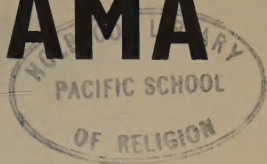


# CHRISTIAN DRAMA

WINTER 1961



# THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN

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166 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C. 2

*Telephone:* COVENT GARDEN 3304-3305

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Cover photograph: Faustus and Mephistopheles in "Dr. Faustus" at the Old Vic

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All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.



## EDITORIAL

When this issue appears the World Council of Churches will be meeting in New Delhi. At the end of another year, a year in which terror and violence have been renewed in many parts of the world, when the dread of global war has become more intense, Christians may feel it is hard to follow the old hymn and count their blessings. Yet as we hear again the Christmas message and the angels' promise of peace, we can find much cause for rejoicing. Slowly the deep, sad wounds are being healed in Christ's body, the Church. Though so much remains to be done, there has been great progress towards unity: towards a true and honest unity wherein differences of emphasis and interpretation are still possible. In our Society, Christians of many denominations have already learnt to work together for a common purpose. Drama which demands total and unselfish co-operation if it is to be successful, may be a small image of what is to come in God's time. The International Conference proved again that "there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for ye are all one in Christ Jesus". We are not being over-proud of our own imperfect efforts if we hope and pray that the meetings in New Delhi will be as full of charity and as productive of hope.

In this issue we have not tried to develop a single theme but have included articles which illustrate the wide range covered by religious drama. Suggestions for future issues will be very welcome.

We wish to all our readers and their families a happy and blessed Christmas.

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Articles and letters for publication in *Christian Drama* should be sent to the Editor, c/o The Religious Drama Society, 166 Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.C. 2. Articles should preferably be typed, in double spacing. Letters must be accompanied by the name and address of the sender, but may be printed under a pseudonym if desired. Contributions for the next issue should be received not later than January 15th, 1962.

## LONDON THEATRE

FRANCES GLENDENNING

## "Luther", Phoenix Theatre

John Osborne is the author of *Luther*, Tony Richardson the director, and Albert Finney plays "Brother Martin".

The play opens with Brother Martin being received into the Augustinian Order at Erfurt and being clothed in his monk's habit. This ceremony and the refectory meal that follows with Martin serving at table fix an impression of the rule and the routine, the essential environment for the coming struggle. The outward struggle against the Papacy is the mirror image of the inward struggle within Luther himself.

The first glimpse of the inward struggle comes at the end of Act I during the corporate confession of the monks. The recital of trivial sins is interspersed with Martin's fantasies and fears, fears of his destruction and disintegration. The climax comes with "the fit in the choir", an incident which is difficult to interpret despite the efforts of theologians and psychoanalysts. John Osborne was familiar with *Young Man Luther*,<sup>1</sup> a study by Erik Erikson, the American psychoanalyst, who suggests that the fit, even if partly legendary, was a decisive moment in the development of Luther's personality. The change "made it possible for the young man who in the choir was literally felled by the power of the need to negate, to stand before his emperor and before the Pope's emissary at the Diet of Worms twelve years later and affirm human integrity in new terms". (p. 44.)

If John Osborne was influenced by this chapter, it seems that Tony Richardson, the director, was influenced by two words in the quotation above, "literally felled". Finney's fall is as straightbacked as a tree and not surprisingly draws a gasp from the audience.

A striking quality of *Luther* is the immediate appeal it makes to contemporary hearts and minds. Luther may be as much rooted in time and place as any genius, but John Osborne strides across the historical gap and makes vivid sense of sixteenth-century events and feelings. Who can fail to be roused and moved by the Knight's recollection of the events at Worms four years ago? "... he fizzed like a hot spark in a trail of gunpowder going off in us, that dowdy monk, ... and it blew up and there was nothing we could do, any of us. ... I just felt quite sure, quite certain in my own mind nothing could ever be the same again, just simply that. Something had taken place, something had changed and become something else, an event had occurred in the flesh, in the flesh and the breath—like, even like when the weight of that body slumped on its wooden crotchpiece and the earth grew dark. That's the kind of thing I mean by happen ... I wanted to burst my ears with shouting." Dramatically these words are the more effective as they precede the Knight's puzzled and bitter mediation on Luther's role in the putting down of the Peasants' Revolt in 1525. When Martin enters the Knight dips his hand in the blood of a dead peasant and smears it on his white surplice.

At the end of the play Martin is taken to task by his old Vicar General for siding with the princes against the peasants. "Yes, you're probably right,"

<sup>1</sup> *Young Man Luther*. Erik Erikson. Faber 25/-.





LUTHER AND THE CARDINAL. *LUTHER* AT THE PHOENIX. ALBERT FINNEY AS LUTHER  
JOHN MOFFAT AS THE CARDINAL AND PETER BULL AS TETZEL

he says, unconvinced by Martin's defence. After a generous and moving tribute to Martin's part in the history of Europe and of the Church he says, "All I beg of you is not to be too violent. . . . Don't—don't believe you, only you are right."

His fears for his beloved Martin are transformed by Martin's answer to a question which he had long meant to ask. The question was to do with the extra day that Martin had asked for when he was replying to questions put to him at the Diet of Worms.

Staupitz: You'd known what your answer was going to be for months. . . . Why did you wait?

Martin: I wasn't certain.

Staupitz: And were you? Afterwards?

Martin: I listened for God's voice, but all I could hear was my own.

Staupitz: *Were* you sure?

Martin: No.

The world associates Martin Luther with the doctrine of justification by faith. The twentieth century in its struggle for faith finds meaning in a doctrine of justification by doubt. John Osborne brings the two together in his *Luther*, "Oh Lord, I believe. I believe. I do believe. Only help my unbelief", and the curtain falls on a figure still struggling with the relation of obedience and rebellion, belief and unbelief, father and son. But because he has his baby son in his arms the dimension of the struggle is brought down to human scale.

The dramatic form of *Luther* is a gamble and if John Osborne succeeds, as I think he does, it is because of his own power over words and because of the power of his director, Tony Richardson. Much of *Luther* is in the form of a duet between Martin and another. In other hands this form could be the guarantee of monotony and flatness but Osborne pours out passion and feeling in a tumble of urgent words, often repetitive which involve the audience deeply.

Jimmy Porter's tirades in *Look Back in Anger* woke up the audience with their unfamiliar accent of authentic rebellion and with their unadulterated speech rhythm—a strong dose after our daily diet of advertising copy. In *Luther*, John Osborne's power over words is a still greater triumph.

Meanwhile Tony Richardson and his designer set and join the scenes with immediate insight and feeling for the mood of the play. Their interpretation of the written stage-directions is inspired. This mutual trust and stimulation between author and director leads to a creativity which can never be deduced from the written text.

Far from criticizing Osborne's reliance on Erikson for his interpretation of Luther, it seems to be an example of the proper relation between two specialisms. The father and son, childhood and constipation themes, so carefully and suggestively expounded by Erikson, obviously contribute much to the consistency and congruity of the play. If there is much of Erikson in *Luther*, there is more of Osborne.

He may not share his name, as for example Martin Luther King, the negro leader in the Southern States, but he shares his passionate intolerance of a sick society. Neither could play the role of spectator. When Mr. Osborne







sits down in Trafalgar Square or blasts off about the Establishment, one guesses that not only does he put words into Luther's mouth but also that Luther puts ideas into his head.

### **"Dr. Faustus." Old Vic**

About eighty years after Luther went to Wittenberg in 1511, Marlowe was writing a play about John Faustus of Wittenberg, Doctor. Marlowe lived in an age which felt the effect of Luther's reforms but which was still torn in its undersanding of the power of God and the power of the Devil. The Black Arts of the first Elizabethan age may not seem so tempting to the second but the lust for knowledge which will bring power is even more rampant in the 1960's than in the 1560's.

The author of *Dr. Faustus* is perhaps more dependent on his director than the author of *Luther*. Michael Benthall, at the Old Vic, while not denying the crude slapstick of the antipapalist scenes, does not allow them to destroy the image of Faustus as essentially a dignified and tragic figure. From the first moments, we are made aware of the struggle within Faustus himself as he hesitates before tearing the cross from around his neck, before unlocking the chest which contains his magic books.

Lucifer and the Angels make their frequent entrances and exits entirely by means of lighting which speeds and smooths the production. The Angels stand high up each side of the stage and their lines are set to music by John Lambert. This was a novel and pleasing touch. Their costumes, in the best tradition of religious drama, caught the light as they raised their arms! Michael Annals designed the costumes, and those of the Seven Deadly Sins were as imaginatively grotesque as anything since Hieronymous Bosch.

Paul Daneman plays Faustus and loses not a breath of feeling in the majesty and terror of the last hour. "Ah Faustus, Now hast thou but one bare hour to live. . . ." His move on the line, "O, I'll leap up to my God!—who pulls me down?" is a vivid and stabbing revelation of the choice that he has in fact made.

### **"The Kitchen." Royal Court Theatre**

*The Kitchen* is Arnold Wesker's first play and has nothing whatever to do with the kitchen sink. It is a microcosm of the sorrow and suffering and frustration of the world, acted out by Jews, Greeks, Germans, West Indians, Irishmen and Cockneys as they chop, whisk, roll, fry, boil and grill in the kitchen of a huge restaurant.

As in all his plays, Wesker is fighting for man's life, his abundant life, and the kitchen is a better place than many to show up man's richness and his poverty. This would be an excellent choice for large Religious Drama groups (19m. 11f.) provided there was an expert producer to keep the plates flying in time with the fur and the feelings! John Dexter's production is a miracle of intricate timing and perfect climax.

### **"August for the People." Royal Court Theatre**

Nigel Dennis's play *August for the People* has an almost pre-war *Punch* kind of atmosphere when the "people" only appeared as figures of fun. The main character, apparently held up for our approval, is a baronet who

indulges in saying what he really thinks about the people, the press and various other institutions. The fact that his honesty costs him his sanity is cold comfort after he has trampled so heedlessly on many dreams, and not only dreams but hard-held beliefs. Mr. Wesker fights for man's life on the stage of the Royal Court but Mr. Dennis seems to throw it away.

**" 'Tis Pity She's a Whore." Mermaid Theatre**

John Ford's play was first produced in the 1630's. It is a period piece full of horrors and violence. Apart from the Old Vic performances of Shakespeare, there is little in the London Theatre to recall its long history and it was good to be reminded of one example.

**"The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet." Mermaid Theatre**  
**"Androcles and the Lion."**

These plays of Shaw are not old enough to be historic, merely out-of-date. *Androcles and the Lion* used to figure on my list as a kind of also-ran to more "orthodox" Christian plays. Certainly there is no one more skilful than Shaw in taking what he wants from various philosophies, including Christianity, and using it for his own dramatic purposes.

The vociferous applause at the end of the performance was not so much an acknowledgement of a fair production as a demonstration of the unfailing love of the English for a lion—at any rate on stage.

## THE PURPOSE OF PLAYING

CLIFFORD JOHN WILLIAMS

(The main points from the lecture given under this title at the 1961 Summer School of the Religious Drama Society)

### Give us today our daily bread

Here is a cry as old as the Human Experiment and as new as those pot-bellied infants in the Congo, a cry that has pulled down monarchies and still keeps the majority of mankind on its knees before the great god Mammon. Primitive men, sensing something above and beyond their control, offered up supplications and sacrifices and begged for their daily bread. A common method of communicating with the unknown was by means of an ecstatic dance, at the height of which the soul of the dancer was believed to ascend and seek the ancestors or gods of the tribe. Around the dancer there was a ring, a circle, the one symbol with neither beginning nor end and completely self-contained. This ring was composed of other members of the tribe and great care was taken to keep the circle closed. If it was broken evil spirits could get in and occupy the place of the departed soul in the dancer. This primitive rite illustrates two vital facts: man's need to acknowledge something higher than his own mortality and his need of other men, his interdependence. The second fact exists all the time and man is always made aware of it, but how is the other feeling to be expressed? How can he present



his case before the great unknown and try to find out the meaning of it? How does any young human do these things? By that process, peculiar to the human race, of pretending to be the thing you admire, or love, or hate, and so getting closer to understanding it. By acting and dancing, early men tried to imitate the divine spirits and so get closer to them, or to "catch their eye" as it were. This once achieved they could present their problems in the same way that people tell their problems to a psychiatrist, having taken "centre stage" on his couch. Remember that all this sprang, however complicated or sophisticated it later became, from basic human needs; the physical need of "give us today our daily bread", and the need to investigate who or what can supply those needs and give a meaning to our existence. Thus we find that the purpose of playing and the purpose of praying are parts of the same vital process.

### **This great stage of fools**

After the shock of the moment of birth, for what reasons do we cry, "Give us today our daily bread" and feel that we belong somewhere in the mist that surrounds us in our first days? We relive an accelerated version of the religious and dramatic history of mankind. The mist clears and we give, or learn, names for the faces and things that we meet. We pass through the stage of, in some degree, "hallowing" our parents and express this by the sincerest form of flattery, imitation. We play "mothers and fathers"; later we play "schools"; later our repertoire grows. In all these "performances" we are both actors and audience in one and the same person. We know that we are pretending, but we are pretending so purposefully that we, usually unconsciously, are becoming aware of some part of the truth about the person or thing we are pretending to be and, more significantly, discovering ourselves; holding "as 'twere, the mirror up to nature". The old stories work on this principle. The child, knowing that it is the wolf and not Grandmother in the bed, is concerned for the safety of Red Riding Hood, who thinks it is Grandmother, and so experiences something of its parents' concern for itself. The dramatic instinct has been given us because it is a passport to the knowledge of our human condition and, if we suppress it, in ourselves or in children, we are guilty of a sin against the Holy Spirit.

### **Know thyself**

In the vast, open, circular (note the circle again) theatres the citizens of Greece would gather for the purposes of playing and of praying, which for them were one and indivisible. In the centre of the circle was the altar upon which a sacrifice was offered up before the plays, plays which tried to explain the ways of the gods in heaven, whose names they hallowed, and to hold up the mirror to their own times so that men could see how far the world was from being "as it is in heaven". Like the child, they knew, as we know, that *Oedipus Rex* was not really happening, but it presented and distilled for them a profound comment on a human predicament. The word "Drama" is from the Greek root word meaning "to do" or "perform"—in other words, an action with a purpose. Tragedy and Comedy, too, are from the Greek, and we may best sum up these words by saying that Tragedy deals with man and his relationship with the universe, or God, while Comedy is

concerned with man and his relationship with other men. In other words, Tragedy is concerned with the first four of the Ten Commandments while Comedy is concerned with the other six. Read them, *Exodus XX*, and consider this. In tragedies we are made to see "what a piece of work is man" and to sense the potential is every human soul but, above and beyond all this, we are made to realize that we are looking in a mirror. It is this that disturbs us in tragedy and prompts us to the reaction that is summed up in the words "do not bring us to the test, but save us from the evil one", for the evil one is, like the Kingdom of Heaven, within us. Look at Act III, Scene IV of *King Lear*. The turning point of the play, the purpose of playing *King Lear*, comes at that moment when Lear forgets the selfish old fool that he has been from the opening of the play and prays to and for the "poor naked wretches". Consider this in the light of "Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us" and you will see not only the purpose but the *necessity* of playing *King Lear*.

### **There, but for the grace of God. . . .**

The Greeks were sane enough to realize that you cannot suppress something by pretending that it does not exist, but that there are primitive urges and passions within individuals that must be guided into creative rather than destructive channels. Comedy was their inspired method of letting off steam. It is the great antidote to inhibitions, guilt complexes, neuroses, jealousy, malice, lust, deceit. We can legitimately laugh at the stupidity and the pathetic self-importance of so many of our fellow creatures before we suddenly realize that we are looking in a mirror and laugh again, at ourselves. Once this happens we are cured. That is the highly serious purpose of comedy: to share our humanity, as tragedy prompts us to share our destiny.

### **Babbling on like the heathen**

To what deities are the altars in our theatres set up? It is not true that our drama is, for the most part, godless. It is impossible not to acknowledge a deity whatever name we may give it, and the deities most in evidence are our old friends, Fear and Greed. We fear to face the implications of the human experiment so we write, produce, and applaud plays that set up more comforting and less exacting goals, such as commercial or social success, the Rights of Man, (the Duties are never urged in this kind of play). We fear to accept the facts of sex, childbirth, abortion and capital punishment so we write, produce, and applaud plays in which we are shewn perverted, sentimental and suggestive themes which say "all but . . . Certificate X". There is nothing in creation which is evil. We insult God and make idiots of our selves if we believe that there is. But there is nothing in creation that cannot be made evil by those out for quick profits, in souls or in cash. Greed, of one kind or another, is the main purpose of playing for the majority of commercial managements, and any really creative work for its own sake has been and is, done in spite of, and against, heavy odds. This is not to suggest that things are better outside the commercial theatre. Smug and dogmatic attitudes haunt too much community and amateur dramatic work. Nothing of any value whatever can come out of the atmosphere engendered by such attitudes, just as there is nothing to be gained by certain individuals attempting



to ape the more flamboyant and publicized side of the professional theatre, the whole purpose of playing being lost sight of when this is done.

### What's in a name?

In this age, when language is so often misused, let us consider the title words of the 1961 Summer School: *Contemporary Christian Theatre*. Contemporary the theatre must always be, one of its chief purposes being "to show the very age and body of the time, his form and pressure". When we clear away all the dogmas and the terrible records of wickedness that have stifled the original and astounding teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, what do we find at the heart of it? "Love one another." So, in the word *Christian* we are reminded of the essentially shared experience that the drama gives us, and of our basic attitude in sharing it. "Theatre" is from the Greek word "to see", reminding us of our duties as audience as well as actors: the closed circle again. The price of realizing the implications of these words and of the purpose of playing is, like the price of anything else of value, eternal vigilance. "By their fruits you shall know them", and to assess the worth of the fruit I would suggest two yardsticks to be ruthlessly applied to any piece of dramatic work that may come your way. Hamlet's speeches at the beginning of Act III Scene 2, and the sixth chapter of Matthew's gospel, verses 1-19. And bear in mind *Exodus XX*.

## RELIGION, RITUAL AND THE DRAMA

DENNIS HARRISON

These few notes are an attempt to indicate certain similarities of origin and development existing between the two different dramas of the Greek and medieval periods. In both the sanctuary was the playhouse. Each was nurtured in a sacred ceremony, and each became a function of a whole community. Both of course present different worlds, yet here and there certain points of contrast throw considerable light on each other.

A study of the Greek theatre reveals a twofold origin. If we go back far enough we find a ritual dance in honour of Dionysos, the god of fertility, whose death and resurrection were linked with the death of the old year in Winter and the rebirth of the new in Spring. This dance aptly took place on a circular threshing-floor. Later an auditorium arose around this dancing place or orchestra. A new artistry was creeping in and the dance became a spectacle. Later still a stage building broke into the circle, and a new kind of performer, the actor, joined the chorus of singers and dancers. With the actor came epic stories of Greek heroes. Thus at first there was ritual, followed later by the epic and so the drama was born. To the "here and now" of ritual was added the "once upon a time" of epic. The sense of "here and now" in ritual originated of course from the vital concern with which an early people viewed the recurring conflict of the seasons on which their staple of life depended. Thus it was that the tension of a life and death

struggle between Winter and Spring in the early rites still persisted in the struggle between the hero and Fate in tragedy.

From a fusion of the ritual and the epic came impersonation, in which the life and death of the hero was played out and recapitulated in the present. From the epic came the recapitulation of the hero's story, from the immediacy of the ritual arose the sense of present happening in dramatic performance.

We may say, then, that the dramatic quality of the retrospective in the present arose out of the dual influences of ritual and epic.

The hero came on to the stage shortly before his death. All the events leading to his death were introduced in exposition. Through the actor's art, it was assumed that he did not know what would happen to him. Thus each revelation that increased his misfortune was simulated by those taking part as a shock. The audience who knew the myth from which the story was taken entered into the pretence and were able at one and the same time to predict with the Fates the course of events, and could conspire with the actors to relive the crisis in their hero's life. In this we have the beginnings of the dual dramatic experience or irony and participation.

The concerted attention which a group of people share towards a ritual or dramatic action originates from the sympathetic rites of primitive times, when the action was both retrospective and anticipatory.

For instance, the action of the would-be-hunter throwing an imaginary spear was an imitation of a past action and a wishful projection of a future one, to which the gods would respond with a good kill. Similarly the action of the rainmaker sprinkling water from his bowl was in imitation of rain and a prayer for more rain.

One begins to see how the ways divided into the religious rite on the one hand and the drama on the other. In the former, imitation was a reaching out in a kind of mimic prayer. In the latter, imitation became an end in itself, an artistic spectacle.

This is probably the basis of the distinction between symbolic and dramatic action. In the early Church symbolic gesture was retained in worship, but full dramatic representation was finally rejected.

Alluding to the symbolic action in the Mass, the eleventh-century Honorius of Autun mentions the prayer *Orate fratres* when the priest portrays Christ exhorting the apostles to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. Again, the priest by stretching out his arms represents Christ hanging on the cross. Outside the important part of the Mass symbolic gesture grew into a freer dramatic action, when tropes or dialogues began to accrue to the service. The most celebrated dramatic tropes evolved around the Easter festival.

This little drama of Christ's Resurrection has incidentally in both its theme and simplicity of presentation a faint echo of the Greek drama. Deacons in white albs would impersonate the three Maries, who would approach a representation of the Tomb where the fourth deacon impersonating the angel would ask "Whom seek ye in the tomb, oh Christians?" The others would answer "Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified, oh heavenly one", to which the angel would finally respond, "He is not here; He has risen as he foretold. Go and announce that he has risen from the tomb". For this little drama the Rubrics were in fact stage directions with moves and action-notes for the four actors.



There was a point beyond which the Church Ritual became intolerant of dramatic insertions, and the subsequent history of the medieval theatre demonstrates a separate dramatic development along the lines of Christian doctrine and inspiration. Unlike the Greek drama which, as we have seen grew out of the conventions of a quasi-religious ritual, Christian drama proceeded to develop alongside Christian worship rather than from it. In the Attic theatre conventions like the Chorus, the tactful treatment of violence and the shape of the theatre itself came from ritual observance.

Thus, where ritual was a formative influence in Greek drama, it was of little account in the development of the medieval. In theme however, the Christian inspiration waxes strong throughout the medieval drama.

Even the comic scenes are functional to the main story. An example of this is the *Wakefield Shepherd's Play* in which a stolen lamb is hidden in a cot. The shepherds who are looking for the missing animal, see the cot and are about to pay their respects to the new baby, when the fraud is discovered. This scene of comic realism offers a kind of counterpoint to the succeeding Nativity episode.

In the Attic drama it is true, there are echoes of early ritual and religious themes, but they are, apart from plays like the *Bacchae* of Euripides, little more than echoes. Again certain plays like those of Aeschylus show a strong religious bias. When, however, we come to the Middle Ages, we are in the completely different atmosphere of revealed religion with its assured, all-embracing theology. This of course is reflected in the drama both in theme and presentation. The theme of Redemption is theologically developed from Lucifer's Rebellion to the Final Judgement, and as far as presentation is concerned, what must seem a sprawling series of episodes assumes, in the light of this theology, a definite shape and unity. Again, medieval drama is conditioned by doctrines such as those relating to grace and salvation which temper the dramatic mood and cut through the tragic emotion altogether.

In the Middle Ages, men lived in a universe every part of which was attributed to a Divine Ordinance. Man's life on earth was a time of trial, the end of which was the salvation or loss of an immortal soul. Death, though serious enough for the medieval audience, was of relatively less importance than spiritual perdition. In contrast to this, the Greeks were wont to confine their tragic drama to the span of life on earth, and death was the great misfortune. If we press the point further and see whether the idea of spiritual perdition would have yielded some tragic emotion to the medieval drama, we are reminded that a man was committed to Hell not only in the full knowledge and advertence of will in an evil act, but his final end could not have come about without a complete rejection of Grace.

In Greek Tragedy there is an element of uncertainty. The opposing forces of Man's will on the one hand, and Fate on the other, are so balanced that the slightest weakness, deviation or flaw on the human side will bring about the tragic dénouement. In medieval drama, a man is free to choose between good and evil, and once disposed to do good he is aided by Grace.

Thus the error of judgement or the tragic flaw which Aristotle considered sufficient for the uncoiling of the spring of Fate in Tragedy is here discounted. Finally, whatever the uncertainty at the beginning of the Greek play, we are left in no doubt about the hero's final state. His fall is beyond dispute. No

such certainty is possible within the Christian framework, since a man's ruin in this life has no bearing on his state in the other. His ultimate end is known only to God.

In spite of so much that was didactic in the medieval mystery plays, it is important to remember that they were in fact spontaneous celebrations of firmly believed and acknowledged mysteries of faith. A dramatic celebration on a great festival of the Church like Corpus Christi takes the mind back to the Greek dramatic festival of the Great Dionysia.

Under the double impact of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the whole theocentric universe of the Middle Ages seemed to collapse. The drama eventually became secular in inspiration and neo-classic in form. No body of drama like the medieval cycles appeared again.

Thus briefly we see the beginnings of Greek drama as a development from a ritual which survived its religious inspiration and helped to shape the future drama. Turning to medieval drama, we find once again the seeds of drama in religious ritual.

We then notice how, as it grew, the drama broke away from the Church precincts but continued to develop under its doctrine. Pursuing the comparisons between the Greek drama and the Medieval, we find that the spirit of the medieval mystery plays seemed to produce a mood completely at variance with that of the classical drama.

## THE DILEMMA OF CHURCH DRAMA

OLOV HARTMAN

There are two incompatible tendencies in the theory and practice of Church Drama.

The first is illustrative; it aims at giving easily-digested instruction, and generally harks back to the Middle Ages; though this is not necessary, since it is perfectly easy to move the theatre—a pious theatre—into the church. So long as some respect is shown for the church building, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with this. Only, why call it a “church play” just because the chancel provides suitable scenery for a work which would be equally at home in the theatre? The problem which faces the church drama movement is to avoid sharing the fate of the medieval mystery play—that of gradually losing its altar.

Here we touch the second tendency in church drama—the liturgical. This is often forgotten. Much is said about the Church's interest in preaching, but her prayer is seldom mentioned. The liturgy in fact contains enough dramatic material to explain the origin of church drama. The tenth-century tropes cast in dialogue form are not merely a question of communicating with the congregation; rather they are adoration in dramatic form.

Indeed, it is not a question of making the prayers and the sermon more interesting; preaching and liturgy demand it. The dramatic action arises out of the spoken word, and the metaphor becomes a power-charged sign.



Church drama is no addition to the liturgy, rather it is a branch on its tree. Hence, the Biblical texts and the liturgical tradition of the congregation determine the content of church drama.

They also determine its form, and at this point Church drama parts company decisively with the theatre. There is nothing to stop the theatre taking its subjects from the church, but church drama must obey the same rules as those which apply to church music and art; this the theatre need not do.

The most important consideration is the orientation to the altar. When the later medieval church drama was transformed into a tumultuous folk festival this principle lost its importance. But until it has been re-established we shall be unable to talk about a renaissance of church drama.

Originally, "dramatic illusion" was not considered essential. It is of course, normally directed to the audience, and when it is turned to the altar it is merely comic. Illusion was not demanded by the medieval church play. A couple of platforms will suffice to denote Jerusalem and Jericho. This is true also of costume: A Swedish thirteenth-century manuscript refers to *cappis* and *dalmaticis*. The translator renders these as "shawls" and "long clothes". So the leather clad shepherds and toga-adorned pseudo-Pilates stalk across the stages of Europe in defiance of the "copes" and "dalmatics" of the original. The Federation for Liturgy and Drama is perhaps nearer the truth when, in *The Prophet and the Carpenter* it uses a surplice adorned with a simple anchor-cross to indicate the seamen.

This has also had its effect on the question of movement? Tuve Nystrom has done pioneer work here: instead of the dashing hither and thither, we have statuesque scenes with very slight movement to indicate what is happening. And then the matter of entries: why should the actors pretend to leave the act of worship just because they have nothing to say at this particular moment? They are no distraction if they sit at the front, as was the custom in the medieval liturgical plays. If they spoil the illusion, they certainly do not interrupt either the proclamation or the prayer.

As church drama is linked to the liturgy, so the chorus will reappear. Because it is closely associated with the corporate body who celebrate a cult, the chorus is present in the original medieval liturgical drama, as it was in ancient Greece. In the liturgical tradition it represents the congregation, and voices their prayer. It also appears among the cosmic powers, as in the Greek Orthodox Mass, where it represents the angels. When the congregation is degraded into a mere audience, then the chorus is out of work. When the community is restored in common adoration, turned eastward, altarward, with the action, then the chorus reassumes its own and obvious task.

This has happened. But far too rarely. Church drama is still afraid to turn its back on the audience. Far too often the actors faces shine only for the critics in the front row of the "pew-stalls". There are invisible foot-lights, and the object is to "be seen of men" like the Pharisees. So we are forced into the dreary dualism of actor and observer.

The dilemma of church drama is not that it is an old form making an appearance in modern times. The link with the Middle Ages is not enough. We must go back to the very source of the liturgical drama. And this source is neither the *Quem queritis* responses of St Gallen, nor any *Biblium Pauperum*. It lies nearer home—in the liturgical life of our own church as it now is. If

church drama submits to the power of the liturgy the dilemma is transformed into a task. A task which is vital to both liturgy and drama.

### Translator's note

Olov Hartman wrote this article in 1956. The above is a highly compressed version of his original. It leaves out most of his appeals to medieval texts.

P. W. T.

## HENRI GHÉON AND THE FRENCH CHRISTIAN THEATRE

PAUL BLANCHARD

(Abstract of a reply to a question asked at the Royaumont Conference)

The French Christian Theatre and its contemporary development cannot be understood (speaking theatrically and not solely from the religious point of view) except in the perspective of the general evolution of the French Theatre. At the end of the nineteenth century there was an almost complete rupture between the theatre and Christian thought, because the French Theatre was entirely dominated by naturalism, by bourgeois thinking, by the *pièce à thèse* (the only representative of the theatre of ideas), and a Parisian spirit of the boulevard which in its superficial fluency was very different from the true spirit of France.

At the end of the century, a reaction began to appear. This was at once poetic and idealistic. The Théâtre de l'Oeuvre, founded and directed by Lugné-Poë, attracted writers and poets of the symbolist school. It was this theatre which, before 1914, began to stage the plays of Paul Claudel.

This movement towards the return of poetry to the theatre came to a head at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier under the direction of Jacques Copeau. It was during the evolutionary period of this theatre that Henri Ghéon made his debut. He took part in the foundation (1919) of the *Nouvelle Revue Française* with André Gide and Jacques Copeau. In his first plays he found a new poetic form: the contemporary social tragedy *Le Pain*, staged at the Théâtre des Arts by Jacques Rouché in 1911, is a remarkable example.

During the 1914-18 war, Ghéon was converted to Catholicism. This entailed a break with Gide and the *Nouvelle Revue Française*. Ghéon, who had it in him to become a great dramatist, now devoted himself with fervent zeal to becoming a dramatist "for the faithful". Some of his Christian plays rise to dramatic heights. Notable are: *Le Pauvre Sous L'Escalier*, a life of Saint Alexis, staged by the Vieux-Colombier; *Le Comédien et la Grace* (translated as *The Comedian*) on the conversion of Saint Genesius the Roman actor, staged later by an atheist producer who greatly admired it; and *La Complainte de Pranzini et de Thérèse de Lisieux*, played by the Pitoëffs, which deals by implication with the profound theme of the Communion of Saints. It shows the young Thérèse making of her religious vocation a redemptive offering for the crimes of Pranzini, a one-time assassin.



Besides his major works, of which the above are examples, Ghéon wrote large spectacles of commemoration or celebration. *Le Mystère de l'Invention de la Croix*, of which the well-known *Way of the Cross* forms a part, is a notable instance. He also wrote many lesser pieces of widely different moods and types, often devoted to episodes in the lives of saints. Some of these are still much played in France and in other countries (Belgium, Canada, Switzerland, etc.). But in some countries the production of his plays is limited by their rigidly Catholic inspiration.

Nevertheless, Henri Ghéon has made a contribution of capital importance not only to the French Theatre but to all who are concerned with a Christian drama. Some people, in France at least, look on him with disdain as a writer for a "tied" theatre. But it was Ghéon who got through to the Christian popular audience and infected it with the cleansing spirit of the Vieux-Colombier. By doing so he set the French Christian theatre on the road towards the achievement of that high quality of which it has since proved itself capable.

## CHRISTMAS IN BASUTOLAND

ANONYMOUS

Basutoland, in its pastoral way of life and its social structure of Paramount Chief, Chiefs and Ward Chiefs, perfectly reflects the state of Old Testament Israel at the time of the Shepherd Kings. This thought has often occurred to me as we have the good fortune to travel through the country, but it was confirmed when on the last night of the High Commissioner's tour we were invited to a first meeting of the newly-formed Multi-Racial Social and Cultural Club which took the form of a singing of Carols by Candlelight in a small mountain village. There was also to be a pageant and the people who took part in it were the people one sees every day doing the things they do naturally every day—a peasant woman on a donkey coming with her husband to a shed, "because there was no room in the inn" (how common in the Union of South Africa only they would not in any case be admitted to the inn because of the apartheid laws). Shepherds who were the herd boys who traditionally guard the cattleposts in the high mountains from the age of eight onwards—spending the whole winter alone, with only a hut for shelter. The Kings as they came were figures familiar to the scene. The actors all came and went as they do in everyday life. And the thought struck me—surely the Holy Family were dark-skinned enough to be nearer the Basuto in colouring—as with the Madonna at Conserrat in Catalonia the early ikons, Cimabues and Giotto's—rather than the golden and white Madonnas of Fra Angelico and Botticelli?

We were bidden for nine o'clock at night, and we made our way back to the "pitso" ground where that morning the High Commissioner in his ceremonial uniform, had addressed the crowds who had ridden in on their ponies from miles around to hear him. But this time the peasants were raised to the place of honour. The simple canvas-covered pavilion that had

sheltered "the chiefs and rulers of the people" from the sun in the morning was turned into a stable by the scattering of straw, and the High Commissioner and his suite were on chairs amongst the semi-circular lines of people seated on the grass.

It was a perfect night, warm, quite still with many stars and a moon in the first quarter. The beauty of the audience in itself was breathtaking. Every one had a candle, and the dark faces of the Basuto with their brilliant eyes shining in the soft light, and the sculptural quality of the blankets that wrapped them, and of the cloths that swathed their heads, were emphasized by shadows. The fairness of the European children with their golden hair and blue eyes shone in contrast. But here there was no antagonism—all were mingled together as they shared a common expectation. The choir was made up of Basutos, men and women, and the conductor was one of the leading Basuto National Congressmen. The choir was as always entirely unaccompanied, and sang with strength and fullness. The carols were pitched rather high but the singing was perfectly in tune and the words were sung by the audience in Sesuto or English according to convenience. Two commentators, one in each language described the scenes and a man on a very tall ladder picked out the chief factors with a spotlight, the rest being in darkness. When all was ready and the large audience was sitting quietly the light shone on a little procession of white-robed children carrying candles who came forward and presented, first the High Commissioner's lady with a bunch of flowers, then the High Commissioner and the Resident Commissioner with wonderfully decorated programmes that the children had made themselves, the covers sparkling with pictures of frosted angels. Then the pageant began.

Suddenly there appeared out of the dark sky an enormous tinsel star points and all, that slid on a rope over the heads of the audience, and came to rest above the stable. The first carol was "Silent Night", and while it was being sung one of the most familiar of daily sights appeared, a Basuto woman wrapped in her traditional blanket sitting on a donkey. The only thing that was unusual was that the donkey should be led by a man—usually in Basutoland the women fend for themselves. As we sang "Once in Royal David's city" the donkey came through the audience and the woman wearily got off the beast and helped by the man, climbed into the pavilion in which that morning the High Commissioner had sat. The picture was pure Giotto. The African has the capacity of keeping absolutely still until the next time movement is necessary, and in all these scenes the actors stayed completely motionless, yet entirely relaxed.

As Mary and Joseph were taking their places by a cradle that was already there, we had been vaguely aware of movements of lights some way off at the side, and as the choir sang a Basuto hymn quite unknown to us, we turned and there we saw a gaggle of about twenty little herdboys, just being little Basuto herdboys, dressed in their sacks and blankets, with their sticks in their hands, gathered round a large bonfire. And as we sang "While Shepherds watched their flocks by night" a dark angel appeared, white-robed, crowned with silver, and with his arms stretched above the children stood quite still on the far side of the fire. We sang his words of salutation, and as the carol said "forthwith appeared a shining throng of angels praising God on high"



a band of white-robed children—their dark faces bright with happiness—joined their herdboy friends by the fire and stood sculpturally still behind the tall angel in the centre. The firelight shone in their eyes and behind them were black trees just visible against the starry sky. When we had finished the familiar hymn, the choir and the company generally sang one in Basuto telling of the birth of our Lord. The herdboys stood up and disappeared scrambling into the darkness, two angels came across in front of us, went into the stable and stood holding a Basuto blanket stretched out to make a screen in front of the Mother. The herdboys reappeared running and jostling joyously, and came right through the audience, climbed the steps and knelt in front of the stable. At the end of the carol the angels took the blanket away, and there was Mary with a real Basuto baby sitting on her knee, whom she tenderly lifted and tucked into the cradle. At that moment we all sang “O come all ye faithful”. The two angels stood white-robed with ritually clasped hands behind the Mother and Child, as in any Roger van der Weyden or Botticelli picture, and from that time onwards until the end of the pageant, whether the light was on them or not, they never moved.

As we sang “Brightest and best of the sons of the morning” the Three Kings appeared. They came from the side out of the darkness, three men on beautiful horses led by a boy. As the commentator said there was “A King from the East”—a man dressed in silken draperies with a jewelled turban on his head, his body naked to the waist with baggy silk trousers, a band round his head with a jewel on his forehead. “A Basuto King”, and a blanketed Basuto appeared, his horse led by a herdboy, “The Representative of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II” and the Senior District Commissioner, bare-headed, dressed in his white uniform with its rows of medals, led by his fair-haired, slender, twelve-year-old son, rode in on a shining chestnut, a Union Jack under its saddle as a horse-cloth. For good measure his two dogs had followed him who added to the naturalness of the scene. The “Shining throng of angels” appeared out of the darkness and stood behind the central figures, the herdboys knelt in front and the Three Kings mounted the platform, kneeling at the side, then each in his turn, while we sang of “Gems of the mountain and pearls of the ocean, myrrh from the forest and gold from the mine” stood up and went forward, knelt before the Mother, offered his casket of gifts, and returned to his place. So the picture was held.

Then to “Hark the herald angels sing”, the pageant dispersed—the Kings rode off, the shepherd boys came back through the audience, the angels went off singing through the darkness, their white robes glimmering through the trees till they disappeared and their voices faded to silence.

The pageant was over. In time it had lasted only three-quarters of an hour, but through its simple reality, it has taken us back 2,000 years.

## A HOLIDAY AT SCHOOL

EDWARD COLLIS

Meeting a cacophony of strangers, all sharing reminiscences nineteen to the dozen, my wife and I felt overwhelmed; but after twenty-four hours although the cacophony recurred at meal-times (a hundred and seven enthusiasts don't eat in silence), the strangers had begun to separate out into people we now knew, and by the end of eight days' work and play we could name most of them and had made several good friends.

On the journey to Bangor we felt apprehensive. A Religious Drama Society Summer School on "Contemporary Christian Theatre". What was it going to be like?

"You don't know what you've let yourself in for," said Father Cordell, the Anglican chaplain, the evening we arrived. After dinner and a cheery official opening by the Bishop of Bangor we found out.

The School was split into groups of twenty or so, each with its own project to occupy most of the eight days. Our group decided to do a modern *Pilgrim's Progress*, the life history of a scientist to whom we gave the name Adam Pilgrim. Script? We compiled it as we went along, and Adam at different stages in his career was played by three men—a young research physicist from Oxford, a Dutch parson who is also a well-known poet, and myself.

For a few hours the School was re-divided into five different groups (where we got to know another set of people and a new tutor), and each of these prepared one "act" of a modern Bible story, *Noah in Outer Space*. This too, was extemporized, and full of bright ideas: Noah used a rocket to save himself, his family—and two of each kind, dehydrated and carried in polythene bags.

All the plays—the groups' separate productions and the epic Noah—were given "demonstration rehearsals" on the last day, with everybody looking on. This needed a good deal of courage in the performers, particularly in those like Wim, our Adam II, who was half-extemporizing in a foreign language, but many of the results were very impressive and all the comedy was intentional!

There was plenty of activity besides the rehearsals: some fascinating lectures on the theatre, an uproarious entertainment, a sightseeing tour, classes in dramatic movement and choral speaking, a visit to a delightful puppet theatre, discussion groups, a dance, and a moving recital of poetry and music called "God with Us". The short, informal School service at 9.40 each morning in the assembly hall was conducted by the two chaplains, Anglican and Free Church, but the Anglicans were able to use the College Chapel for Holy Communion at 7.45 a.m. and for Compline at 9.30 each evening.

The R.D.S. runs a Summer School every year and its policy is to make the theme different every time. We met people who had been to ten or more successive Schools; there could be no better recommendation for the tremendously stimulating and entertaining experience we found it to be. We're hoping to go to next year's School at Culham—if we can get in.



## OBITUARY

We are indebted to the *St. Ives Times*, by whose kind permission we reproduce the following tribute to one who was always a staunch member of the Society.

### MISS CONSTANCE MURRAY ANDREWS—AN APPRECIATION

With the recent passing of Miss Constance Murray Andrews, at Tring in Hertfordshire, Cornwall has suffered a great loss in the realm of religious drama—a loss far greater than many people realize.

Inspired by high ideals coupled with artistic and dramatic talent, she had the inspiration to combine the two, and here was the vision which led to the formation of the Cornwall Religious Fellowship.

As the founder and chief advisor she devoted all her energies to this work, until failing health compelled her to limit her activities behind the scenes, leaving to others the more active parts; for this reason many of the newly-formed groups and younger players are unaware of the debt we all owe to her early efforts.

She realized that besides pulpit and press, drama is another powerful means of expressing the Christian faith and way of life. Many people would rather see a play than hear a sermon, and the living story played out before their eyes creates a more lasting impression upon audience and actors alike.

More than once have players been heard to say "I never knew it meant so much before".

All this, and more, Constance Murray Andrews knew, and so the C.R.D.F. was born, and groups were formed up and down the county, mainly through her efforts, in churches and village halls and even in the Cathedral.

On two occasions she herself produced plays at the Minack Theatre, Porthcurno, of a very high standard, but her chief aim was to reach out to as wide a circle as possible, and she would have liked to see a group in every town and village, expressing in their own way the ideals which meant so much to her, and which are often lacking in much of what goes for art and drama today.

No better memorial could be devised by those who treasure her memory than to ensure that the work which she started in Cornwall, and for which she gave so much, should continue and expand as she would wish to see it.

## LIBRARY

The Library is now open from **11 to 12 a.m.**, and from **1 to 4 p.m.**, **Mondays to Fridays, both inclusive.**

Please note that the Library will be **closed completely during the first week in January 1962** for checking purposes.

## CHANCEL THEATRE GROUP

Patrons: The Right Hon. Viscount Astor

The Dean of King's College, Cambridge, the Rev. Dr. A. R. Vidal

The Group was formed a year ago as a dramatic society for Christian members of Oxford University, who are interested in presenting good drama to Churches in the Provinces. Each summer a play is to be taken on to firstly as an act of worship and secondly as a means of raising money for the Ockenden Venture. The tour is conducted somewhat on the lines of a pilgrimage and work each day begins with communal prayer. The Group is interdenominational and was composed this year of Anglicans, Congregationalists and a Methodist.

The play chosen for this year's tour was Christopher Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners*. The author himself generously gave up two days to advise and assist with the production. The first performance was given in Oxford on August 19th and from there the Group proceeded to London via Bath, Bristol, Portsmouth, Hove and other towns in the southern counties. The final performance was given on September 11th in St. Saviour's Church, Warwick Avenue, W. 9. The play was always performed in a church and the invitation of the vicars concerned many people from the Free Churches attended the performances. At no performance was there a congregation of less than 100 and at London there were more than 400 present; it is estimated that more than 2,500 people in all attended one of the fifteen performances.

An appeal was made before the tour began for funds to back the production. Many church dignitaries and well-known people from show business and the arts generally gave their generous support. Much of the equipment for the production, too, was lent to the Group, including a lorry which is normally used as Methodist mobile Sunday school. It was the policy of the Group not to charge for admission, so that no one should be debarred from attending a performance. However, a retiring collection was taken and it is hoped that, once expenses have been deducted, the Group will be able to give about £250 to the Ockenden Venture, which was founded ten years ago for the education in Britain of children from the displaced persons' camps in Germany and Austria.

Throughout the tour the performance was well received and so plans are already being made for another one next year. The producer is consulting with the Religious Drama Society in the hope of finding a suitable play; the business-manager is planning an itinerary and preparing to launch another appeal for backing for the production.

## TRAINING

### Summer Courses

CARINA ROBINS

An article about our annual course at Bangor last August appears elsewhere in this magazine. The subject was *Contemporary Christian Theatre* and we broke all records with 140 students and five families. Fifty-four of the students were men or boys, thirteen came from overseas, and we had more young people than ever before who enlivened their elders and helped



to make it a memorable nine days. Under a first-rate team of tutors we concentrated mostly on improvised drama in order to give fresh ideas to producers of youth and adult groups.

Next year we shall be at Culham College, near Oxford, from August 21st to 30th, and our Training Committee met in September to decide on the general outline. The idea is to have a solid training in drama and a carefully-planned fellowship through worship. In addition to rehearsal sessions there will be classes in speech, movement, design and so on: these can be repeated for several years so that our regular students can choose a different subject each year.

The number of students will be limited to 120, aged from fourteen-and-a-half years, and we shall aim at a balance of age groups.

There's no doubt about it, this annual course is becoming of increasing value to those who are concerned with the promotion of drama as a means of Christian communication in contemporary life. Students—both clergy and laity—think it worth their while to save money for many months, to spend nine days of their precious holiday, and to pay their fare whether from Cornwall or Canada. Grants or bursaries are available for an increasing number of students, whether teenagers or adults, either from their Local Education Authority, from the King George Jubilee Trust (grant to R.D.S. for youth work), from a diocese, a church or a club.

We would appreciate even more co-operation from our members in the encouragement of the type of students who have the ability to make full use of this training for the benefit of their club, group, church or diocese.

An attractive leaflet giving particulars will be ready by January, and, from our experience of this year when a waiting list was begun in June, may we warn members of the need to book early.

### **Design Course**

This will have been held during the weekend of November 10th to 12th in the crypt of St. Mary-le-Bow, London, under the direction of Miss Stella Mary Pearce. It is fully booked, and an account of it will appear in the next number of the magazine.

### **Youth Leaders**

This is the second course that we have arranged for those who, as Christians, want to use drama as a group activity with young people. It will take place on ten consecutive Tuesday evenings, starting January 8th, 1962, at the Central Y.M.C.A., London, and the tutors are Clifford John Williams and Alan Wilson. They are planning a thoroughly practical course, and particulars are now available in our office.

### **Music and Drama**

We are holding a non-residential weekend course from April 27th to 29th, 1962, at Southwark Cathedral Chapter House.

The tutors, Clifford John Williams and Geoffrey Ford, will give practical sessions on the use of many kinds of music to accompany mime, dance or song, and incidental music in drama. Mr Vernon Sproston (producer of *Viewpoint*, B.B.C.) will demonstrate the creation of sound-effects and the

use of tape-recorders. Our music adviser, Christopher le Fleming, hopes to be with us for part of the weekend.

### **Other Courses**

Since Bangor we have tutored at a number of courses, for instance: during September, an evening of voice-training at Hendon, a weekend at Bletchingley Surrey, and a morning with clergy wives of Worcester Diocese. In November a weekend at Launde Abbey, Leicestershire, and four lectures at the Selfe Oak Colleges, Birmingham.

Next January there will be a one-day course for Portsmouth Diocese, in February a one-day at Brighton, in March two lecture-demonstrations at a Service Chaplains' Training Conference, Bagshot, on "Christian Communication and Religious Drama".

We welcome suggestions from members concerning any form of training and we are prepared to arrange courses in any part of the country, provided that someone is willing to do the local organization.

## **SCHEMES FOR YOUTH WORK IN THE COMING YEAR**

### **London and South-East**

Training at Central Y.M.C.A. for one night a week for ten weeks. Tutors Clifford John Williams and Alan Wilson, organized by Miss Robins and N. Graham and D. Gilby.

### **South Midlands—Coventry**

Residential weekend training, including special matinée performance at the Belgrade Theatre. Organized by Martyn Colborn and a Committee including the Cathedral Youth Officer. Bursaries to next year's Summer School.

### **North**

Weekend training to include Youth Leaders, senior members of clubs and a special effort to interest young clergy. Bursaries to Summer School. Organized by Committee for Northern Province.

### **Bristol and West Country**

Professional assistance with the production of a play for the 1962 Youth Congress. Residential weekend course. Bursaries for Summer School. Organized by F. Collinson and the Bristol Branch.

### **North and North-East**

Three-day Training and Conference to cater for groups of 13 to 15-year-olds, 15 to 21-year-olds, and a group of adults connected with Youth work. Bursaries to Summer School. One-day training and a two-day residential training for Youth leaders and senior club members (these connected with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme for Girls), and introducing Religious Drama into ordinary clubs. Organized by J. Madden and Mrs. Nutman.

Work in clubs will be continued, in order to meet requests already made and to help in cases of urgent need. Those arranged already are:

Salvation Army, Walthamstow—Alan Wilson.

Church of England Club, Battle, Sussex—I. Cheater.

East End of London Open Club—S. Hutchinson.

## CORRESPONDENCE

(A reply to the letter from Miss Thornborough printed in the last issue)

MY DEAR PEGGY,

I felt I must write to you about your letter in *Christian Drama*. I enjoyed reading it very much, and I agree with every word you say . . . almost. I know you realize, from your appreciation of the fragment I showed you, that the type of play you suggest is exactly the type I am trying to write . . . one with real people, and real problems, relevant to the present day.

I am equally sure you don't realize just how difficult it is to put this into practice. I know you quote *Roots*, *A Taste of Honey*, and *Look Back in Anger*, as the virile, honest, stirring sort of play that appeals to you; but to me, all that these plays say, or rather shriek, is, "This is life, life as we know it, and it can't be changed!" How can we present this as Christian Drama, unless we plead the old adage that even the worst of us can serve as a horrible example?

The point is that life *can* be changed, and frequently is. The playwright's problem is to demonstrate this in the characters of the play without actually putting it into words. The process in real life may take months or years, sometimes a whole lifetime, and only a hint of it can be given in an hour or so of playing.

Now the problem is, who is going to give the hint? If your hero, as you suggest, is torn with doubts and fears, he can't be the one; and I can assure you, *en passant*, that the turmoil of the soul can't be expressed by rolling round the floor in physical agony. One can always pop in a "Voice of God from the Wings", or an Angel or two, but you condemn this as cheating. I'm sure you would also shudder at the idea of a parson, or even a probation officer!

I remember a letter of Donald Swann's in an earlier *Christian Drama* in which he said he couldn't bear to see another "simpering Vicar or effete social worker" on the stage. The trouble is that when you try to translate such people into terms of drama this is exactly the way they sound. There is some indefinable quality about a truly Christian person that can easily be recognized in real life, but that persistently defeats copying; also one is faced with the fact that it would probably be impossible to act, anyway!

The most magnificent Christian truths, put into the mouths of contemporary characters, suddenly turn corny on you; the loveliest thoughts sound trite, and stodgy, and priggish. Say what you really believe, through the voice of one of your cast, and you'll be accused of preaching.

There, of course, the Elizabethans score. It was quite natural, in those days, to talk frankly, even profoundly, about God and the Devil, virtue and vice, Heaven and Hell. Today it isn't done to mention them (except in rare and delightful places like R.D.S. schools!) and particularly it isn't done to write a play in which it is obvious from the start that the writer is "on the side of the Angels". Entitle your next venture, *'Tis Wonderful She's a Virgin*, and who would go and see it?

Maybe I'm exaggerating. I know there have been plenty of successful plays on the "social improvement" level, but is this enough? Take, for example, your idea of a musical on the style of *West Side Story*. Can one go deeper than the feeling expressed at the end of this very play, when compassion for the girl, at the tragic deaths of her brother and her lover, brought together the two rival gangs, and awakened new hope for the future? Any attempt to attach religious significance to this would have met with catcalls, or worse, I think.

So there you have it. I agree with every word you say . . . almost! The vision is there, but how does one bring it down to earth, or more properly, on to the boards? I know exactly the sort of play you mean, but whether you'll get it or not is another matter!

Affectionately,

HELEN CLARKE.



## ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

### PLAYS

**Curtmantle.** CHRISTOPHER FRY. (O.U.P., 10/6.)

A new play by Fry is awaited with interest as much for its infrequency as for the expectation that former glories will be repeated. When he takes a subject already treated by modern dramatists, the interest is heightened and the expectation prepared for comparative criticism. More than twenty-five years ago, Eliot wrote about the martyrdom of Becket in a play where the King never appears but is mentioned only as a dark power behind the action. Now both Anouilh and Fry have concurrently brought out plays where the plot centres on Henry II, showing his youthful friendship with Becket, their estrangement after the worldly Chancellor had become the austere Archbishop, Becket's exile and return to death, and the King's subsequent penance.

A considered judgment on *Curtmantle* must wait until it is performed in the country. In reading, it is comparatively a disappointment: compared, that is to say with what Fry can do rather than with what Anouilh and Eliot have done. Henry does not emerge as a wholly convincing figure; his complexity is recognized, but there is no image of the underlying identity. The author's foreword acknowledges this, and is content to offer the play as "no more than a sketch of Henry". The other declared theme, the interplay of the many types of laws which govern the human condition, is better fulfilled. As in all Fry's work, the dramatic poetry is splendid and the prose powerful. The ordinary characters are wholly human, yet transformed by a touch of sympathy to greater awareness. It is with the great figures of history that he seems less happy. He has always cared more for what people are than for what they represent, and their ultimate significance has broken through implicitly rather than explicitly. Henry, Becket, William Marshal and the others seem pale and insubstantial beside those characters which spring only from Fry's imagination. Yet Henry too reaches his moment of personal tragedy when he learns of the murder of Becket. This is not the best of Fry's plays so far, but it is still better than most plays by other dramatists in the last few years.

*Raymond Chapman.*

**Five Nativity Plays.** FRANCES WILKINS. (A. R. Mowbray & Co. Ltd., 4/-.)

Five playlets, each lasting about ten minutes, written for children 7-11 years old, with notes for teachers. All are concerned with the theme of offering to Our Lord the best in gifts, in talent and in worship, and all are centred round the manger at Bethlehem. But the variations on this simple theme are lively, imaginative and clearly written. *The Best Gift of All* is about the gifts offered to Jesus by a strange variety of animals. *A Cradle for a King* concerns the carpenter who made the manger. *Babouschka* is based on the attractive Russian legend of Babouschka, the eastern St. Nicholas. In *Even unto Bethlehem* two modern children flash back into Bethlehem at the time of the incarnation. *The Shepherd's Story* is less vividly told than the other four playlets. All are adaptable to the capabilities of the children taking part.

**He is Risen.** TREVOR RICE and COLIN TURNER. (Epworth Press, 1/-.) 2 scenes and epilogue. 13m., 2w.

Brevity can be a great virtue; it can even be a good fault; but in *He is Risen* the resurrection is related almost more briefly than in the New Testament. Almost all the resurrection stories are pushed together to form a one-act play lasting fifteen or twenty minutes, and the plot becomes peculiarly telescoped, whilst the characters have no time to develop. The exception to this is St. Thomas, who is drawn quite vividly. The play ends with an unlikely epilogue, in which Annas becomes the Christians' advocate, and half believes in the resurrection himself. This play needs to be presented by an experienced group of players.

## CHRISTIAN DRAMA

**Innocent Sabotage.** STANLEY B. DAVIS. (Methodist Missionary Society.) 3 scenes. 10m., 5w.

A short play of approximately thirty-five minutes dealing with a missionary problem of the lack of support and help at parochial level. In the second and important scene, Chris, in a dream sees how this cannot only hinder but disrupt work in the mission field.

A play which could be of good use for a missionary evening. Good production notes on music and costumes.

**The Story of Jeremiah.** JOHN HUNTER, NORMAN SPOONER and VERA ALLEN. (Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, 5/-.) Typescript. Library. 14m., 4w. Extras.

This musical was commissioned by the Committee for Religious Drama in the Northern Province, as an experiment in Christian Communication. It was first produced by the Committee's adviser, Pamela Keily, and twice subsequently by the assistant adviser, Martyn Colborn. *Jeremiah* is an experiment in a new field (the Christian musical) and we commend it to the attention of all those working with young people.

**War over Bethlehem.** JOAN SELBY LOWNDES. (Faith Press.) 1 hr. 8 scenes. 3w., 5m. or more.

There is dignity and a straightforward approach in this play designed predominantly for boys. Benjamin, the shepherd boy, is the link appearing in every scene except the first; the women's speaking parts are all in the first scene which could facilitate separate rehearsal. There are clear directions and stage plans but too much explanation in the dialogue accounts for a lack of vitality.

*E. Peake.*

**The Windmill Book of One-Act Plays.** Ed. E. R. WOOD. (William Heinemann Ltd., 6/-.)

A Collection for youth clubs and schools which includes: *Daniel and Bela* story from the Apocrypha by John Bradwell (4m., 1 old woman and crowd). This brings out the clash between Daniel and the priest of Bel and Daniel and the king in lively dramatization which should provide plenty of interest and scope for youth club members. There are use useful acting notes.

*The Enchanted Christmas Tree*, by Percival Wilde (4 adults, 20 or more children). This fantasy is less likely to appeal to modern youth. The hard hearted grown-ups who have shut out the Christmas spirit are brought before a court of children. A sure touch and robust acting will be needed if this play is not to become sentimental.

The National Secretary will be grateful if any members having spare  
copies of

### CHRISTIAN DRAMA

Winter 1960-61 (Vol. IV, No. 4)

will kindly send them to him for office purposes

## FAR AND WIDE

### Bethesda, Maryland, U.S.A.

The Chancel Players of the Bethesda Council of Churches has just completed its second production, *Sign of Jonah*, by Guenter Ruttenborn. Six different denominations were represented in our cast and performances were given in the chancels of two Gothic-type churches and in two of the newer, glass-walled types of churches. The traditional and the modern made their own comment of the substance of the play.

Each church greeted the Players and entertained the cast at supper before the evening service. After each performance there was a coffee-hour and discussion so that the congregation might examine the content of the play. *Jonah* is particularly appropriate in this spring of 1961 while the war-criminal trial is going on in Israel.

H. A. K.

\* \* \*

### Christchurch, New Zealand

The Society have recently held a Canterbury Religious Drama Festival for three nights with nine entries. The fine school hall was used and there were two entries from Roman Catholic groups. After the wonderful co-operation between the churches for the Society's Passion Play this is a promising sign.

The Chamber of Commerce did all the publicity for the Festival and the Rotary Club underwrote the whole cost.

All the churches were involved. The Salvation Army were Roman Soldiers and the Anglicans, Roman Catholics and Non-Conformists formed sewing groups to make the 200 costumes.

The Adjudicator was Mrs. Wendy de la Bere.

\* \* \*

### Dorchester

#### *Murder in the Cathedral*

#### *Imaginative Presentation*

The dramatic side of the Dorchester Abbey Festival was represented by the performance of T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, performed by a cast of amateur players from Oxfordshire and North Berkshire, under the professional direction of Marie Birt.

This event was presented by the Festival Committee with the help of the

Religious Drama Committee of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

Marie Birt used the chancel of the Abbey with considerable imagination. The dip of movement on the stage before the dip of fear in the women's brains, for instance, showed quite unusual directorial ability and sensitivity. Some scenes remain vividly in the memory: Becket preaching his Christmas sermon over the glow of candles, and the pattern formed by the head-dresses of the women which seemed to flit before and there in the darkness like white bats in an age-old night of sorrow.

#### "Possessed"

The players of the women of Canterbury spoke sometimes with great beauty and always with the quality of being "possessed" by the thoughts and feelings which, as Chorus, they interpreted.

Although the players were clearly uneven in quality and experience, Raymond Williams as Becket always had the right sort of authority and intelligence and the voice to dominate his surroundings.

Tony Talbot, a player well-known in City and County, effectively doubled the parts of Tempter and one of the murdering knights, and Henry Lowman as the leader of the knights, had the "gentlemanly" brutality that the play needed.

Afterthoughts on the presentation compel one to suggest that if Dorchester Abbey is to become a centre for religious drama presentation, it will be necessary to take some steps to counteract the "dead" sound pockets in the Abbey acoustics.

O. W.

\* \* \*

### Edinburgh Festival

While visiting the 1960 Edinburgh Festival, I was inspired to take a company to join the fierce competition in the Fringe in 1961. I noted the ever increasing list of small back-street halls adapted for this purpose and the almost inevitable financial loss and thought again. I wished to present something of spiritual value, not only to the audience



ut to the cast, who were necessarily going to spend a large proportion of the year rehearsing and organizing with this goal in mind.

The sight of St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral provided the answer. T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral* was the obvious choice. The Provost agreed; the middle week of the Festival was fixed for performances and from then on the venture never looked back.

A company was formed from the Lambeth Drama Club, itself only formed in 1960. The Lambeth Council sponsored performances in Lambeth churches during the Lambeth Festival in June and performances were given in several other churches before and after the Edinburgh Festival. The production was simplified for this purpose.

In Edinburgh, the grandeur of the setting plus a specially built tiered platform, effective lighting and the excellent singing of the Sine Nomine singers who acted as choir monks, enhanced the production and carried it beyond a presentation of high standard into the realm of human experience. Although this end had been consciously worked for and the amount of audience participation carefully planned, the reality was beyond all expectation.

The production played to almost 10,000 people and approximately £500 was made for charitable purposes after all expenses were paid.

Of course, there were criticisms as well as eulogies but this production proved beyond doubt that a religious play of merit combined with artistic competence and the will to reach the hearts and minds of the audience can satisfy and reward at every level in a way seldom achieved by secular drama.

I have been invited to produce a play for presentation in St Mary's Cathedral during the 1962 Festival and have begun work upon an adaptation of *The Wakefield Mystery Cycle* for this purpose. The company will be formed shortly and performances in churches and cathedrals are already being organized for the period of July to October.

JEAN CLAUDIUS.

\* \* \*

Full

It has been suggested to us that *Christian Drama* may be interested in news of our last production and our forthcoming Christmas production.

In June the Company of the Way had the honour of being the only amateur company apart from a student group to be included in the Hull Arts Festival programme. On this occasion we gave a production of Norman Nicholson's *Birth by Drowning* in the church of St Mary, Lowgate. The play was produced by Gillian Holtby in such a way as to make full use of the church and yet at no time to lose the essential significance of the altar. The end was helped greatly by a solo soprano setting of "I will life up mine eyes unto the hills", composed specially for us by John Joubert. The performance was received enthusiastically by a large congregation who had no qualms about laughing in church! And we found a similar response when we later toured it to other churches in East Yorkshire.

Our next production is really a chance to "let our back hair down" for a change. A rare opportunity for a religious drama group! We are giving the first ever amateur production of *Dad's Tale*, a Christmas family entertainment which we intend to perform "in the round" in any church or village halls that will have us. This play is written by Roland Allen and is the property of the Studio Theatre Ltd. at Scarborough who have very kindly allowed us the performing rights and will be produced by Muriel Crane.

It is a modern fairy tale-cum-pantomime with dances introduced as an integral part of the action and is very funny—the first really funny play we've ever done and we are looking forward to it.

PAMELA DOLLAR.

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## Manchester

### *Murder in the Cathedral*

Manchester Diocesan Drama Group,  
Manchester Cathedral.

With this ambitious and imaginative production set against the stone backcloth of the cathedral's vaulted interior, religious drama in the Manchester diocese has at last come of age.

This is due partly to T. S. Eliot's superb flow of language, for the play has its own sure place in the literature of this century.

More especially, though, is it the result of Miss Keily's appreciation of the limits of the cathedral as a theatre,

and a cast which can rank equally with any like group in the country.

Miss Keily's production (incidentally, in her professional career she played in the New York production of this play) hinges on the intelligent use of simplicities—clear but not elaborate lighting, realistic but not exaggerated costume.

The cast remains anonymous, as is traditional with groups of this kind.

### *Triumphant*

Archbishop Thomas Becket stood out both for his excellent diction and his grasp of character.

Here was a man torn by temptation and yet triumphant over it—a part played as near to perfection as an amateur can get.

The four knights were almost as good, and in their soliloquies at the end of the play really punched home all Eliot's points of argument.

Mention must be made of two final features—the character of the choral speaking by the women and of the music. In particular, the chanting was extremely effective.

A. R. McC.

(Reprinted by kind permission of the  
"Evening Chronicle," Manchester)

\* \* \*

### **Nqutu, Zululand**

The play of *Jonah and the Whale* was written and produced by Miss Doreen Playne.

The actors of the play were from Standards V and VI of the school, which being in a British Protectorate, still belongs to the Church. We all worked extremely hard for three weeks, and gradually the boys and girls came to understand the three stories which alternated in the play: Jonah being shown on the left of the stage: the story of Bokuyise, a modern Swazi boy, on the right: with the Christ theme in the centre. Parallel or contrasting ideas linked the three stories, e.g., the sailors of Nineveh in the Jonah story, cast lots to see who is causing the storm at sea, and this was followed by the witch-doctor on the opposite side throwing his bones to see who was bringing bad luck to Bokuyise's friends; while later, in centre, the Roman soldiers dived for the robe of Christ. Blame avoidance

was the key of another act, when on left, the sailors of Nineveh, throw Jonah overboard, refuse to take responsibility for his death. A gang on the other side of the stage attack Bokuyise, and afraid lest they have killed him, all deny having given the fatal blow. In the centre, Pontius Pilate washes his hands, professing innocence of the blood of Christ. Later, Jonah is delivered after being three days in the whale: Bokuyise is rescued, after being trapped underground for three days in a mine disaster: in the centre the Resurrection of Christ on the third day, is celebrated. It was seen that it is easy to repent after deliverance from great trouble, but the lesson of the play was that only daily penitence can keep us close to God, and so enable us to rejoice with Him when sinners repent. It would take too long to tell all, but I hope many of you next year will see the coloured transparencies and hear the tape recordings which tell the full story.

I was left wondering whether the performance was really worth all the countless hours that had been spent in writing, translating, typing, rehearsing, but when the Head Master wrote to report that three of the boys who had taken part had come to tell him that they had begun to hope that they might one day become priests: I had no further doubts of the worthwhileness of it all, and felt very thankful that the play had been so blessed.

D. F.

\* \* \*

### **St. Pancras**

For their autumn production the St. Pancras Deanery Players chose Jane Bridie's *Tobias and the Angel*. This might at first seem very ambitious, having due regard to the limitations of parish hall stages and lights. However, this enthusiastic company, with Mr. Cordell to direct them, overcame all such basic difficulties by their carefully well-devised settings and capable stage management and the help of a lighting expert. The result was a supreme success. The audiences in the Church Hall, College Place, on October 22nd and 30th, agreed that it was the best of their many good productions.

Bridie's treatment of the Book of Tobit affords many opportunities for interplay of the spiritual and material worlds, and the Players missed none

these. The Archangel Raphael, disguised as the porter Azarias, was most convincing, displaying angelic patience with a touch of resignation and dry humour, as well as all the necessary firmness, in the guidance of a very human Tobias. In Raphael we could each see our own guardian angel.

The inevitable ultimate victory of good over evil, typified by the defeat of Asmoday, was a dramatic climax, and the handling of this very difficult scene, usually shunned by amateurs, deserves the highest praise. With magnificent authority the Archangel disposes of the demon and resumes his humble rôle.

The reality of the ministry of angels was brought home to us by the impact of the Archangel upon this cross-section of human society, combining the follies and weaknesses, sins and imperfections, common to us all.

By their very fine presentation of this inspiring and thought-provoking play the Company gave us not only great pleasure but intellectual and spiritual stimulus, making us yet more conscious of the goodness of God in constituting the services of angels and men in that wonderful order which links Heaven and earth for ever.

\* \* \*

### Woking

Residents of Woking were doubly fortunate on Saturday when the Chancel Theatre Group from Oxford University performed *A Sleep of Prisoners* in Christ Church. Fortunate because opportunities of witnessing religious drama of this calibre are rare enough and again because Woking was one of the fifteen places selected by the group for their tour this summer.

The group consists of a number of members of Oxford University formed together into a Christian Dramatic Society, whose sole function is the production of religious drama on tour, their present one having ranged from Oxford to London via Bath, Bristol and other towns in the southern counties.

Such a company works, of necessity, at a disadvantage. Every "stage" on which they perform is different—a difficulty which need only be emphasized by noting that no curtains can be used and all movement between scenes must be

made in total darkness—and every church will vary in size and acoustics.

The manner in which these difficulties were overcome to present an unhesitating and polished performance on Saturday merited considerable praise. The stage setting was of the simplest and yet was extremely effective in conjunction with the lighting arrangements. Special words of congratulations are due to the three members of the group whose functions backstage were made with a quiet efficiency that added considerably to the success of the evening.

The play selected for this year's tour—the first by the group—showed that from the outset they have demanded of themselves a very high standard. Indeed a programme note emphasized that religious drama of either poor content or performance can easily approach the blasphemous, but it would certainly appear that this group need have no fear of having that charge levelled at them. There was in their performance a ring of sincerity that would have left no doubt as to the aims of those concerned even had it not been stated in the programme.

That is not, of course, to say that the play is without its lighter moments, but these were handled by the cast with the utmost delicacy to make them precisely fitting to the work as a whole.

It was, perhaps, unfortunate that the acoustics of Christ Church should have detracted somewhat from the more dramatic dialogue when words were blurred by echoes, but the drama was more than sufficient to carry these shortcomings and leave the audience with a sense of the profound.

The group make no financial demands upon the audiences other than silver collections. Profits were donated to the Ockenden Venture. It is to be hoped that that charity benefits materially from the performance as much as the audiences do spiritually.

Perhaps the itinerary of the group's 1962 tour has already been planned to benefit those towns and areas not fortunate this year. Would it be too much out of keeping with their aims for us in Woking to be selfish enough to extend a most warm invitation to visit us again then?

(From the "Woking Mail")



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